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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - TFG RESHUFFLES CABINET

REF: A) Nairobi 1655 B) Nairobi 1698 C) Nairobi 1732

¶1. (SBU) Summary. On August 17 Somalia's Ambassador to Kenya Mohammed Nur notified us of a major cabinet reshuffle. Changes include new Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Treasury, Information, Land Transport, Water and Minerals, the Minister of State for the Prime Minister, and the Minister of State for the Presidency. On August 18, the Ambassador notified us that the President and the Prime Minister of Somalia had approved the reshuffle, although no official announcement has been issued. The President's Chief-of-Staff has also confirmed the changes. Several of the Ministers are unhappy with the reshuffle. Politically, the moves bring an experienced leader into the Defense Ministry, and respond to Abgal clan concerns by selecting Abgals for the cabinet. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Somalia's Ambassador to Kenya Mohammed Nur on August 17 notified us of a significant cabinet reshuffle. The reshuffle comes after several weeks of restructuring rumors and on the heels of several military successes in the Galgaduud and Hiraa regions (reftels A and B). On August 18, the Ambassador told us that the President and the Prime Minister have signed their approval of the re-shuffle. The President's Chief-of-Staff has also confirmed the changes, although we caution that, as of this writing, no public announcement has been made.

¶3. (SBU) Details of the appointments follow:

-- Minister of Foreign Affairs: Ali Ahmed Jama "Jingele" (Darod/Harti/Dhulbahante). "Jingele" is moving to MFA from the Transport Ministry. He replaces Mohamed Abdullahi Omar (Northern Dir/Isaak), who recently found himself at odds with the Prime Minister. "Jingele" was Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Foreign Minister under President Abdullahi Yusuf. He also served as Post and Communications Minister under former Prime Minister Gedi, and reportedly held several cabinet and diplomatic posts under Siad Barre, including ambassadorial appointments to Egypt, Yemen, and the UK. In 2008 he was among ten ministers who resigned from former Prime Minister Nur Adde's cabinet during a dispute between Nur Adde and Yusuf. Later in 2008 at the UN he publicly denounced President Yusuf as an obstacle to progress in Somalia. "Jingele" has an advanced degree in economics from Egypt.

-- Minister of Defense: Abdullah "Boss" Ahmed (Northern Dir/Isaak). "Boss" replaces Mohammed Abdi "Gandhi" (Darood/Ogaden). A defense minister under former President Yusuf and fisheries minister under former FM Gedi, "Boss" was a key member of the Joint Security Committee where he advocated a peaceful merging of the TFG with the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) in Djibouti in January 2009. Even after he was appointed to the Ministry of Water in February 2009, he continued to work closely with "Gandhi" and

other TFG security sector officials until a mild stroke sidelined him in April 2009. He reportedly has recovered fully from the stroke, but still suffers from occasional poor health. We estimate he is in his early 70s.

-- Minister of Treasury: Abdirahman Omar Osman "Engineer Yarisow" (Hawiye/Abgal/Wabudhan). This is a new cabinet position reportedly created for a member of President Sheikh Sharif's Abgal clan. Before his appointment, the 40 year old "Yarisow" was the Director of Communications and Protocol for President Sharif. He is a member of the Somali Concern Group, a U.K.-based Somali diaspora organization. He is reportedly a close friend of Yusuf Garad, the head of the BBC Somali Service who is a frequent critic of TFG. Even though "Yarisow" is Abgal, he is said to be closely associated with the Rahanweyne, his mother's clan. He holds a British Passport.

-- Minister of Information: Dahir Gelle (Hawiye/Abgal/Waesle). Gelle replaces Farhan Ali Mohamud (Hawiye/Habr Gedir/Duduble), possibly because Mohamud was often absent from Mogadishu. Gelle is an ARS Member of Parliament and a trusted ally of President Sharif, whom he has known since the two were members of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). He was a member of the ICU's Communication Committee in 2006. Gelle studied political science in Egypt and is said to have good contacts there. He is a former member of Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya, and is regarded as one of the more intellectual and politically active ARS MPs, along with Education Minister Wayeel and Justice Minister Farah. Gelle founded Mogadishu's Radio Qur'an/Holy Qur'an Radio. We estimate he is 40-45 years old.

-- Minister of Air and Land Transport: Mohammed Abdi "Gandhi"

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(Darood/Ogaden). A self-professed dilettante on defense issues, anthropology professor "Gandhi" moves from Defense to Transport. According to Ambassador Mohammed Nur, "Gandhi" is likely extremely unhappy with his reappointment. It is unclear whether he will remain a key TFG interlocutor with restive Darood politicians and operatives who favor a semi-autonomous Jubaland state and who may be organizing to confront al-Shabaab. Juba contacts are concerned that a rumored Juba offensive to take Kismayo will not happen unless "Gandhi" remains in charge of the initiative, despite his removal as Minister of Defense. Jubaland contacts are reportedly encouraging "Gandhi" to approach President Sharif about this issue. The Juba offensive was planned to begin within weeks (reftel C). "Gandhi" is in his 60s.

-- Minister of Water and Minerals: Mohamed Abdullahi Omar (Dir/Isaak). Oxford and Cambridge-educated entrepreneur/consultant Omar appears to have been demoted, possibly as a result of differences of opinion with the Prime Minister and Finance Minister over, among other issues, advocating competing transparent financial mechanism for international assistance, and failing to lobby for sanctions against Eritrea at the last African Union (AU) Summit, which reportedly frustrated President Sharif. On August 17 Somali Ambassador Nur told us he talked to Omar, who was upset by his reassignment. Omar told Nur he had discussed his reassignment with President Guelleh of Djibouti. We understand that President Guelleh in turn has called President Sharif to express his unhappiness with the decision. Nonetheless, Omar's background may be better suited for his new ministry.

-- Minister of State for the Prime Ministry: Khalid Omar (Digil and Mirifle/Digil/Bagadi). A long-time TFG MP, Omar served as President Yusuf's state minister. He grew up in Mogadishu but his sub-clan inhabits Afgooye, Lower Shabelle. Omar is a dentist by profession.

-- Minister of State for the Presidency: Hassan Maalim (Hawiye/Murasade). An ARS MP, Maalim was previously the influential chief of cabinet at the presidency. A British subject, he grew up in Mogadishu and has comparatively little formal education. He may be in his early 40s. His appointment as State Minister appears in part a response to criticisms that Maalim should not have served as chief of cabinet as an MP. It also allows him to maintain his influence at Villa Somalia.

-- Minister of State for Planning and International Cooperation: Abdullahi Sheikh Ali "Qolo'ow" (Hawiye/Gugundabe/Dagodia). Before this appointment, "Qolo'ow" was a long-serving senior UNDP Somalia staff member. He served in Siad Barre's government in various capacities, including in the planning ministry, and as Mogadishu deputy mayor. He has also taught at Mogadishu University. "Qolo'ow's" daughter is married to former TFG Prime Minister Gedi's son.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Although we've been assured there will be a formal announcement, we caution that the TFG has not yet publicized this reshuffle. If implemented, however, these moves accomplish several important goals. First, they bring two Abgal clan members into the cabinet as a by-product of President Sharif's overtures to the Abgal, and likely in exchange for greater Abgal military backing to the TFG. Returning security-savvy "Boss" to the Defense Ministry seems to correct a poor choice for defense made early in the unity government. New foreign minister Jingele comes with valuable governmental and diplomatic experience.

RANNEBERGER